

Farm Bills: Major Legislative Actions, 1965-2023

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The farm bill provides an opportunity for Congress to address agricultural and food issues comprehensively about every five years. Over time, farm bills have tended to become more complicated and politically sensitive. As a result, the timeline for reauthorization has become less certain. Beginning in 2008, farm bills have been subject to various developments that have delayed enactment, such as insufficient votes to pass the House floor, presidential vetoes, and extensions.

On November 19, 2023, Congress enacted a one-year extension (P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102) of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334), often called the "2018 farm bill." The 2018 farm bill expired on September 30, 2023, and with the 2023 crop year (crops harvested in 2023). The extension continues authorizations until September 30, 2024, and for the 2024 crop year.

In 2023, no markups or legislative action occurred to reauthorize the farm bill besides the extension. The 2018 farm bill took eight months from introduction to passage and failed initially by vote in the House. By comparison, the 2014 farm bill took more than 21 months from introduction to enactment, failed by vote in the House, and spanned the 112th and 113th Congresses, including a one-year extension. The 2008 farm bill took more than a year to enact and was complicated by revenue provisions from another committee of jurisdiction, temporary extensions, and vetoes.

Most farm bills have been introduced in the first session of a two-year Congress (the odd-numbered year). Three of the farm bills that were introduced in the second session—the 1970, 1990, and 2018 farm bills—were enacted during a lame duck Congress of the same year. The 2014 farm bill was the first farm bill to start in one Congress (2012), remain unfinished, and require reintroduction in a subsequent Congress.

This report examines the major legislative milestones for the last 12 farm bills covering 58 years.

SUMMARY

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The farm bill provides an opportunity for Congress to address agricultural and food issues comprehensively about every five years.¹ Over time, farm bills have tended to become more complicated and politically sensitive. This has made the timeline for reauthorization less certain. Recent farm bills have been subject to developments that have delayed enactment, such as insufficient votes to pass the House floor, presidential vetoes, and extensions.

On November 19, 2023, Congress enacted a one-year extension (P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102) of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334), often called the "2018 farm bill." The 2018 farm bill expired on September 30, 2023, and with the 2023 crop year (crops harvested in 2023).² The extension continues authorizations in the 2018 farm bill that were in effect on September 30, 2023, until September 30, 2024, and for the 2024 crop year.

In 2023, legislative action for reauthorization of the farm bill began with the one-year farm bill extension. No committee markups were held.

In 2018, the legislative timeline began with markup in the House Agriculture Committee in April 2018. An initial floor vote in May failed by 198-213, but procedures allowed that vote to be reconsidered (H.Res. 905). The House passed its bill in a second vote of 213-211 in June 2018. In the Senate, the Agriculture Committee reported its bill in June 2018. The Senate passed its bill by a vote of 86-11 in June. Conference proceedings officially began in September and concluded in December 2018.

The shortest farm bill debate in the past six decades was related to the 1973 farm bill, which was enacted less than three months after being introduced. In contrast, the 2014 farm bill took more than 21 months from introduction to enactment, spanning two Congresses.³ The House initially rejected a farm bill in 2013 and then passed separate farm and nutrition assistance components—the first time a chamber-passed farm bill did not include a nutrition title since 1973. The House later procedurally recombined them for conference with the Senate.

Both the 2002 and 2008 farm bills had expired for about three months (from October through December in 2007 and 2012) before extensions were enacted. In each case, like in 2023, the fiscal year began under a continuing resolution for appropriations. The extensions of the 2002 farm bill were for relatively short periods totaling about five months during final House-Senate negotiations. The extensions of the 2008 farm bill, effective in 2013, and the 2018 farm bill, effective in 2024, were for a full year.

This report examines the major legislative milestones for the last 12 farm bills over 58 years, a period representing modern farm bills with growing complexity.

 Table 1 contains a history of major legislative action on farm bills since 1965. Figure 1 shows the major dates on a timeline.

Timelines for Enactment, Extension, and Vetoes

Different parts of a farm bill are authorized for different periods of time. Fiscal years, calendar years, and crop years can be important to different programs. Programs authorized by the 2018 farm bill (P.L. 115-334), as extended (P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102), now generally expire

¹ See CRS In Focus IF12047, Farm Bill Primer: What Is the Farm Bill?.

² See CRS Report R47659, *Expiration of the Farm Bill*.

³ These dates span only the official introduction of a bill marked up by committee until the President signed the bill. They do not include background hearings before committee markup, which would extend the timeline.

either at the end of FY2024 (September 30, 2024) or after the 2024 crop year, which varies among crops.⁴



Figure 1. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 1965-2023

Source: Figure created by CRS using Congress.gov, http://www.congress.gov.

Timeline Relative to Fiscal Years

Enacting farm bills after the end of the final fiscal year for which programs have been authorized has been a common occurrence. In the past 42 years covering the nine farm bills since 1976— when the federal government began using a fiscal year that began on October 1^5 —only the 1977 and 2002 farm bills were enacted before the September 30 expiration date for programs that would have been affected by the fiscal year.⁶

⁴ A primary exception to expiration in 2024 is the parts of the conservation title that were extended to 2031 in P.L. 117-169, commonly known as the Inflation Reduction Act. See the "Conservation Programs" heading in CRS Report R47659, *Expiration of the Farm Bill*.

⁵ The federal fiscal year changed in 1976. A "transition quarter" was added to move the beginning of the fiscal year from July 1 to October 1. See Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables: Budget of the U.S. Government*.

⁶ Before the 1973 farm bill, which was the first to incorporate reauthorization of the food stamp program that had a fiscal year expiration, the focus of the farm bill was the farm commodity programs that operated by crop years.

The 1981, 1985, 1990, and 2018 farm bills were enacted within three months after the final fiscal year for which programs were authorized ended. The 1996 farm bill was enacted in April 1996 following the September 30, 1995, expiration of some of the authorizations in the 1990 farm bill.⁷ The 2008 and 2014 farm bills were enacted well after their original September 30 expirations and following the enactment of extensions.

Expiration at the end of a fiscal year (September 30) matters for programs with fiscal year authorizations. These programs include certain nutrition, conservation, and trade programs; various agricultural programs, excluding the Title I commodity programs; and many authorizations for discretionary appropriations. The consequences of expiration of a farm bill are discussed in other CRS reports.⁸

Timeline Relative to Calendar Years

Ten of the thirteen farm bills since 1965 were enacted before December 31 in the year of their expirations. The exceptions were extensions enacted for 2008, 2013, and 2024 because action had not been completed the previous year (see "Short-Term Extensions" below).⁹ The 2018 farm bill was the first time since before 1965 that both chambers completed floor action before the end of June.

Expiration at the end of a calendar year matters mostly for the dairy program, one of the farm commodity programs in Title I of recent farm bills. The farm commodity programs are tied to crop years—that is, the year in which a crop is harvested—and dairy is the first commodity that would be affected by reverting to "permanent law," since its crop year begins on January 1 after the year of expiration.¹⁰

Timeline Relative to the Two-Year Congressional Term

Since 1965, 8 out of 12 enacted farm bills were introduced in the first session of a two-year Congress (the odd-numbered year). The other four (1970, 1990, 2014, and 2018) were introduced in the second session of a two-year Congress (the even-numbered year).¹¹

⁷ While the 1996 farm bill was not pressured by the expiration of farm commodity programs in the 1990 farm bill since budget reconciliation in 1993 had extended them through the 1996 and 1997 crop years—some of the original FY1995 expiration dates for food stamps, certain conservation programs, and various authorizations of appropriations continued unchanged and had not been extended by the reconciliation act.

⁸ For example, see explanations in CRS Report R47659, *Expiration of the Farm Bill*.

⁹ The 1965 farm bill was extended for one year, but that extension occurred more than a year before expiration and before the reauthorization process had begun in 1970. The 1996 and 2002 farm bills may appear to have been delayed by being reintroduced (1996) or going through the new year into May (2002), but their predecessors did not require extensions. The 1990 farm bill's original expiration date of the end of the 1995 crop year had less of an effect on the 1996 farm bill's timeline because budget reconciliation in 1993 had extended the farm commodity programs through at least 1996 and, in some cases, the 1997 crops. The 2002 farm bill was enacted before the 1996 farm bill expired on September 30, 2002, and before the 2002 crop year ended. In fact, the 2002 farm bill superseded the last year of the 1996 farm bill by beginning with the 2002 crop year.

¹⁰ *Permanent law* refers to non-expiring farm commodity programs that are generally from the 1938 and 1949 farm bills. The temporary suspension of permanent law is included as a section in all recent farm bills. If the suspension of permanent law were to expire at the end of a crop year, the permanent law provisions would take effect unless a new farm bill, or an extension of the most recent bill, continues the suspension. For more details about permanent law and its consequences, see the heading on permanent law in CRS Report R47659, *Expiration of the Farm Bill*.

¹¹ This counts 2012 as the introduction of what became the 2014 farm bill. Technically, the bill that became the 2014 farm bill (H.R. 2642) was introduced in 2013 (the first session of the 113th Congress), but many consider it a reintroduction of the bills started in 2012 (the second session of the 112th Congress).

Of the four farm bills introduced in a second session, three (the 1970, 1990, and 2018 farm bills) were enacted during a lame duck Congress (after an election) in November and December of the same year. The 2014 farm bill, which was introduced in 2012, was the first farm bill to start in one Congress, remain unfinished, and require reintroduction in a subsequent Congress.

House or Senate Action First

There is no rule dictating which chamber initiates farm bill action. Since 1965, the Senate was first to mark up farm bills in 1973, 1977, 1981, 2012, and 2013. The House was first to mark up bills in 1965, 1970, 1985, 1990, 1995 (and 1996), 2001, 2007, and 2018.

Short-Term Extensions

Extensions of a prior farm bill while its successor is being written had been atypical but are now common in three of the past four reauthorizations (extensions during 2008, 2013, and 2024). Only the 2002, 2008, and 2018 farm bills have required extensions.

When the 2002 farm bill expired, portions of it were extended six times for less than a year total beginning in December 2007 (**Figure 1**,

Table 1).¹² When the 2008 farm bill expired, the entire farm bill was extended in January 2013 for all of FY2013 and the 2013 crop year.¹³ While the 2014 farm bill was expired from October 1 until the 2018 farm bill was enacted, the continuing resolution for appropriations continued many operations, though some new program activity ceased.¹⁴ Because no markups or floor action occurred during 2023 to reauthorize the farm bill, Congress enacted a one-year extension in November 2023.

Presidential Vetoes

Presidential vetoes of farm bills are not common. Since 1965, only the 2008 farm bill has been vetoed as stand-alone measure; it was vetoed twice. A 1995 farm bill was vetoed as part of a larger budget reconciliation package.

President George W. Bush vetoed the 2008 farm bill (H.R. 2419). When Congress overrode the veto to enact P.L. 110-234, it accidentally enrolled the law without Title III (the trade title). Congress immediately reintroduced the same bill with the trade title (H.R. 6124). President Bush vetoed this version as well, and Congress again overrode the veto to enact P.L. 110-246, a complete 2008 farm bill that included the trade title. The overrides in 2008 were the only time that a farm bill was enacted as a result of a veto override.

President Clinton vetoed a 1995 budget reconciliation package that included the first version of what became the 1996 farm bill, but the veto was not due to the farm bill itself but rather the controversial nature of the reconciliation bill in which the farm bill was embedded.

Prior to 1965, the first veto of a farm bill was in 1956, when President Eisenhower vetoed H.R. 12 (84th Congress), the first version of the Agricultural Act of 1956.

¹² CRS Report RL34154, Possible Expiration (or Extension) of the 2002 Farm Bill.

¹³ CRS Report R42442, *Expiration and Extension of the 2008 Farm Bill*.

¹⁴ CRS Report R45341, Expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill.

Implications for Congress

Farm bill reauthorization has tended to become more complex and engender greater political sensitivity. The process of enacting a new farm bill prior to the expiration of the existing law has become more difficult. As stakeholders in the farm bill have become more diverse, more people are affected by the legislative uncertainty around the farm bill process. This lack of certainty may compound questions about the availability of future program benefits.

	House		Senate Conference Report Approval					
	Cmte.	Passage	Cmte.	Passage	Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	Public Law
One-year extension of the 2018 farm bill Covers 2024 crop or until 9/30/2024	until 12/31/	xtension until 9/30, 2024). Provided \$1 baseline with an of	77 million of r					11/16/2023 P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102
2018 farm bill	4/18/2018	5/18/2018	6/13/2018	6/28/2018	12/10/2018	12/12/2018	12/11/2018	12/20/2018
Agriculture	H.R. 2	H.R. 2	S. 3042	H.R. 2	H.Rept.	H.R. 2	H.R. 2	P.L. 115-334
Improvement Act of 2018 Covers 2019-2023 crops or until 9/30/2023	Vote of 26-20 5/3/2018 H.Rept. 115-661	Initial vote failed by 198-213 6/21/2018 Reconsidered under H.Res. 905	Vote of 20-1	Vote of 86-11	115-1072	Vote of 369-47	Vote of 87-13	
		Passed by vote of 213-211						
2014 farm bill	5/15/2013	6/20/2013	5/14/2013	6/10/2013	1/27/2014	1/29/2014	2/4/2014	2/7/2014
Agricultural Act of	H.R. 1947	of Failed by vote	S. 954 Vote	S. 954	H.Rept.	H.R. 2642	H.R. 2642	P.L. 113-79
2014	Vote of 36-10		of 15-5 9/4/2013	Vote of 66-27	113-333	Vote of 251-166	Vote of 68-32	
(113 th Congress) Covers 2014-2018 crops or until 9/30/2018	5/29/2013 H.Rept. 113-92	7/11/2013 H.R. 2642 Farm portion vote of 216-208 9/19/2013 H.R. 3102	S.Rept. 113- 88			251-100	00-52	
		Nutrition part vote of 217-210						
		9/28/2013 H.Res. 361 combined House bills						
One-year extension	One-year e	xtension until 9/30	/2013 and for	the 2013 cro	p year (dairy p	orice support	extended	1/2/2013
of the 2008 farm bill Covers 2013 crop or until 9/30/2013	until 12/31/	2013, and the Milk funding for progra	Income Loss (Contract pro	gram extende			P.L. 112-240 Title VII

Table 1. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 2018-1965

	House		Sen	Senate		Conference Report Approval		
	Cmte.	Passage	Cmte.	Passage	Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	Public Law
Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act (112 th Congress)	7/11/2012 H.R. 6083 Vote of 35-11	_	4/26/2012 S. 3240 Vote of 16-5	6/21/2012 S. 3240 Vote of 64-35		_	_	_
	9/13/2012 H.Rept. 112-669		8/28/2012 S.Rept. 112- 203					
Early partial extension of the 2008 farm bill	Conservation	Extended five conservation programs through FY2014 (Agricultural Management Assistance, Conservation Stewardship Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Farmland Protection Program, and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program).						
2008 farm bill Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 Covers 2008-2012 crops or until						6/18/2008 H.R. 6124 Passed over veto 317-109	6/18/2008 H.R. 6124 Passed over veto 80-14	6/18/2008 P.L. 110-246
9/30/2012					Re-passed as new bill with Title III	5/22/2008 H.R. 6124 Vote of 306-110	6/5/2008 H.R. 6124 Vote of 77-15	6/18/2008 Vetoed
						5/21/2008 H.R. 2419 Passed over veto 316-108	5/22/2008 H.R. 2419 Passed over veto 82-13	5/22/2008 P.L. 110-234
	5/22/2007 H.R. 2419 Introduced 7/23/2007 H.Rept. 110-256	7/27/2007 H.R. 2419 Vote of 231-191	/2/2007 S. 2302 S.Rept. 0- 220	12/14/2007 Amdt. to H.R. 2419 Vote of 79-14	5/13/2008 H.Rept. 110-627	5/14/2008 H.R. 2419 Vote of 318-106	5/15/2008 H.R. 2419 Vote of 81-15	5/21/2008 Vetoed Enrolling error omitter Title III
Short-term extension of the 2002 farm bill	Continued ex	tension until 5/	23/2008.					5/18/2008 P.L. 110-231
Short-term extension	Continued ex	tension until 5/	16/2008.					5/2/2008 P.L. 110-208
Short-term extension	Continued ex	tension until 5/	2/2008.					4/25/2008 P.L. 110-205
Short-term extension	Continued ex	tension until 4/	25/2008.					4/18/2008 P.L. 110-200
Short-term extension	Continued ex	tension until 4/	18/2008 and ad	ded extensio	n of suspensio	n of permane	nt law.	3/14/2008 P.L. 110-196

	House		Senate		Conference Report Approval			
	Cmte.	Passage	Cmte.	Passage	Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	Public Law
Short-term extension of the 2002 farm bill	•	arts of the 2002 fai a commodity prog		15/2008 but c	lid not extend	I the direct ar	nd counter-	12/26/2007 P.L. 110-161 Division A, §751
Early partial extension of the 2002 farm bill during budget reconciliation	through 8/2	xtended the early-expiring Milk Income Loss Contract program for two years from 9/2005 nrough 8/2007 and two conservation programs (Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Security Program) until FY2010.						
2002 farm bill	7/26/2001	10/5/2001	11/27/2001	2/13/2002	5/1/2002	5/2/2002	5/8/2002	5/13/2002
Farm Security and Rural Investment Act Covers 2002-2007 crops or until 9/30/2007	H.R. 2646 8/2/2001 H.Rept. 107-191	H.R. 2646 Vote of 291-120	S. 1731 12/7/2001 S.Rept. 107- 117	Amdt. to H.R. 2646 Vote of 58-40	H.Rept. 107-424	H.R. 2646 Vote of 280-141	H.R. 2646 Vote of 64- 35	P.L. 107-171
1996 farm bill	1/5/1996	2/29/1996	1/26/1996	2/7/1996	3/25/1996	3/29/1996	3/28/1996	4/4/1996
Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996	H.R. 2854 introduced Vote of	H.R. 2854 Vote of 270-155	S. 1541 introduced	S. 1541 Vote of 64-32	H.Rept. 104-494	H.R. 2854 Vote of 318-89	H.R. 2854 Vote of 74-26	P.L. 104-127
Covers 1996-2002 crops or until 9/30/2002	29-17 2/9/1996 H.Rept. 104-462			3/12/1996 Amdt. to H.R. 2854 Voice vote				
Balanced Budget	10/26/1995	10/26/1995	10/28/1995	10/28/1995	11/16/1995	11/20/1995	11/17/1995	12/6/1995
Act of 1995, Title I (Agricultural Reconciliation Act of 1995)	H.R. 2491 includes H.R. 2195	H.R. 2491 Vote of 227-203	S. 1357 includes Senate bill	Amdt. to H.R. 2491 Vote of 52-47	H.Rept. 104-347	H.R. 2491 Vote of 235-192	H.R. 2491 Vote of 52-47	Vetoed
Freedom to Farm Act	8/4/1995 H.R. 2195 introduced 9/20/1995 fails cmte.	_	9/28/1995 unnumber- ed bill	_	_	_	_	_
Early partial extension of the 1990 farm bill		a year before expir or wheat, feed grai						8/10/1993 P.L. 103-66
1990 farm bill	2/5/1990	8/1/1990	7/6/1990	7/27/1990	10/22/1990	10/23/1990	10/25/1990	11/28/1990
Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 Covers 1991-1995	H.R. 3950 introduced 7/3/1990 H.Rept.	H.R. 3950 Vote of 327-91	S. 2830 S.Rept. 101- 357	S. 2830 Vote of 70-21	H.Rept. 101-916	S. 2830 Vote of 318-102	S. 2830 Vote of 60-36	P.L. 101-624
crops or until 9/30/1995	H.Rept. 101-569							

	House		Senate		Conference Report Approval			
	Cmte.	Passage	Cmte.	Passage	Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	Public Law
1985 farm bill	4/17/1985	10/8/1985	9/30/1985	11/23/1985	12/17/1985	12/18/1985	12/18/1985	12/23/1985
Food Security Act of 1985	H.R. 2100 introduced	H.R. 2100 Vote of	S. 1714 S.Rept. 99-	H.R. 2100 Vote of	H.Rept. 99- 447	H.R. 2100 Vote of	H.R. 2100 Vote of	P.L. 99-198
Covers 1986-1990 crops or until 9/30/1990	9/13/1985 H.Rept. 99- 271	282-141	145	61-28		325-96	55-38	
1981 farm bill	5/18/1981	10/22/1981	4/7/1981	9/18/1981	12/9/1981	12/16/1981	12/10/1981	12/22/1981
Agriculture and Food Act of 1981	H.R. 3603 introduced	S. 884 Vote of	S. 884 introduced	S. 884 Vote of	H.Rept. 97- 377	S. 884 Vote of	S. 884 Vote of	P.L. 97-98
Covers 1982-1985 crops or until 9/30/1985	5/19/1981 H.Rept. 97- 106	192-160	5/27/1981 S.Rept. 97- 126	49-32	12/10/1981 S.Rept. 97- 290	205-203	67-32	
1977 farm bill	5/13/1977	7/28/1977	1/18/1977	5/24/1977	9/9/1977	9/16/1977	9/9/1977	9/29/1977
Food and	H.R. 7171	Amdt. to S. 275	S. 275	S. 275	S.Rept. 95-	S. 275	S. 275	P.L. 95-113
Agriculture Act of 1977	introduced 5/16/1977	Vote of 294-114	introduced 5/16/1977	Vote of 69-18	418	Vote of 283-107	Vote of 63-8	
Covers 1978-1981 crops or until 9/30/1981	H.Rept. 95- 348		S.Rept. 95- 180					
1973 farm bill	6/20/1973	7/19/1973	5/23/1973	6/8/1973	7/31/1973	8/3/1973	7/31/1973	8/10/1973
Agriculture and	H.R. 8860	Amdt. to S.	S. 1888	S. 1888	H.Rept. 93-	S. 1888	S. 1888	P.L. 93-86
Consumer Protection Act	introduced 6/27/1973	1888 Vote of	introduced S.Rept. 93-	Vote of 78-9	427	Vote of 252-151	Vote of 85-7	
Covers 1974-1977 crops or until 6/30/1977	H.Rept. 93- 337	226-182	173					
1970 farm bill	7/23/1970	8/5/1970	9/4/1970	9/15/1970	10/9/1970	10/13/1970	/ 9/ 970	11/30/1970
Agricultural Act of 1970	H.R. 18546 H.Rept. 91-	H.R. 18546 Vote of	Amdt. to H.R. 18546	Amdt. to H.R. 18546	H.Rept. 91- 1594	H.R. 18546 Vote of 191-145	H.R. 18546 Vote of 48-35	P.L. 91-524
Covers 1971-1973 crops	1329	212-171	S.Rept. 91-	Vote of 65-7				
Early extension of the 1965 farm bill	More than a	ı year before expir	ation, extende	ed the farm bi	ll for one-yea	r until 12/31/1	970.	10/11/1968 P.L. 90-559
1965 farm bill	7/20/1965	8/19/1965	9/7/1965	9/14/1965	10/6/1965	10/8/1965	10/12/1965	11/4/1965
Food and	H.R. 9811	H.R. 9811	Amdt. to	Amdt. to	H.Rept. 89-	H.R. 9811	H.R. 9811	P.L. 89-321
Agricultural Act	H.Rept. 89-	Vote of	H.R. 9811	H.R. 9811	1123	Vote of	Voice vote	
Covers 1966-1969 crops	631	221-172	S.Rept. 89- 687	Vote of 72-22		219-150		

Source: CRS.

Notes: Includes only major legislative actions. Excludes subsequent revisions, such as in budget reconciliation, except for extensions as noted. Rows are sorted by date of the Public Law column.

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